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Testimony In Support of 2023 Senate Bill 1133: An Act Limiting a Finding of Neglect or Risk of Injury to a Child in Certain Circumstances

Currently in Hearings in the Judiciary Committee March 3, 2023

To the Judiciary Committee:

As a faculty member of Yale's Child Study Center, Psychology Department and Education Studies Program, and Director Emerita of Yale's Calvin Hill Day Care Center and Kindergarten (a program I led for 40 years), I submit this written testimony (I cannot attend the hearings in person) **in support of Senate Bill 1133: An Act Limiting a Finding of Neglect or Risk of Injury to a Child in Certain Circumstances.**

I have been an educator in Connecticut for 50 years, teaching Yale courses in child development and early childhood education. I have been an advocate for high quality child care and education through my work as a director and current member and former President of the Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children (CTAEYC) and an Accreditation validator for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). In addition, I serve on many local, state and national boards whose work supports children and families.

In my long career in this field, I have seen the erosion of childhood, as well as trust in children and the families that raise them. Certainly, the world is a very different place than it was when I raised my two children, now in their forties, with children of their own. But the truth is, that while society has changed dramatically, *children, and what they need to develop as healthy, caring, intelligent, responsible human beings, has not.*

The child development and early childhood content I have taught to Yale students for 45 years emphasizes the long-standing research that **play** is the crucial foundation for all learning – active engagement and experimentation with the natural world as well as the world of toys, objects, and relationships is critical in the formation of children's mental models that underpin their ability to understand, process and relate. Children need unstructured time in order to play freely, create their own scenarios, design individual strategies that allow them space and agency. And they need some time to do this *without* the constant direction of even the most attuned and loving parents.

The world for children is filled of course with school. But the after school times for many children have become crowded, not with unstructured time for child initiated play, but with screens and adult organized activities such as sports, classes for enrichment or additional tutoring and even play dates under close adult supervision. Some of the children I have worked with in the last 10 years have demonstrated a lack of ability to even generate ideas for their own play. Without the organized activity

that fills their out of school time, they have lost the ability to imagine, or even to dream. It is not uncommon to hear them say they are “bored.” It has gotten to be such a worrisome condition that the American Academy of Pediatrics has produced a report which outlines the value of play, and in fact provides a prescription for play (Yogman, M. et al. **The power of Play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. Pediatrics, September, 2018**).

Sadly, there are situations that are truly unsafe for children – neighborhoods in which gunfire is a daily occurrence, where there is little adult supervision, and where poverty and racism fuel violence and community dissolution. These are real fears and call for many actions on the part of our society to address them.

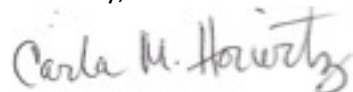
However, the unrealistic constraints called for by many in our culture to inhibit and restrict the independence of children and the judgment of their families about how, where and under whose supervision children may play and engage in activities without surveillance is also a real threat.

Parents in Connecticut have been harassed and even charged with neglect or child abuse for allowing their child to walk two blocks home alone from school, stay home for a brief time while the parent runs a short errand, or gather on a playground with peers in their neighborhood with no grown-ups in attendance. This gives children the message that the world is a scary place (more so than it is). It disrupts the trust children need to be able to have in their parents as nurturers and authorities about their well being, as well as the trust and growing initiative parents need to support in their children. And it inhibits the process of separation and individuation, so crucial to the development of capable young people who will have the confidence and experience to become the next generation of competent adults.

For these reasons and many others, I urge the Judiciary Committee to recommend and support passage of Senate Bill 1133. Our families’, our society’s and our children’s futures depend on it.

Thank you for your attention to this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carla M. Horwitz".

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